DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 964 JC 970 426

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TITLE Breaking Free: Forces that Affect a Center Becoming a College.
PUB DATE 97
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization; Case Studies; Community Colleges; *Education Service Centers; *Environmental Influences; *Multicampus Districts; *Organizational Change; *Organizational Development; *School Organization; Socioeconomic Influences; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

History indicates that when a community college "single college district" opens a new campus center, that center tends to follow one of two different patterns of development. The new campus typically either remains in the subordinate role of a center forming a "single college multi-campus district" or it develops into a comprehensive college creating a "multi-college district." The form that the center takes is influenced by a variety of environmental, social, political, and economic forces. To determine how these forces work together to influence the future structure of a community college, a case study was undertaken at a community college operating two centers that, due to high demand, were operating at capacity. Data were collected from college documents; interviews with board of trustee members, staff, and community residents; observations of planning committee meetings; and a literature review. Study findings suggested that a center is likely to break free from the parent college to become a comprehensive college if the following conditions exist: (1) a parent college has reached its growth potential; (2) the governance structure provides participatory governance and empowerment of the center faculty and staff; (3) the round-trip travel time between the parent campus and the center exceeds 1 hour; (4) the community in which the center is located develops a strong identity and key community players demand "ownership" of the center; and/or (5) resources become available either through state funding or through business and industry partnerships. (Author/HAA)

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Breaking Free:
Forces that Affect a Center Becoming a College

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Breaking Free: Forces that affect a Center becoming a College

by
Patricia A. Spencer

Abstract

History indicates that when a community college "single college district" opens a new campus center, that center tends to follow one of two different patterns of development. The new campus typically either remains in the subordinate role of a center forming a "single college multi-campus district" or it develops into a comprehensive college creating a "multi-college district". The form a community college takes is influenced by a variety of environmental, social, political, and economic forces. This case study looks at how these forces work together to influence the future structure of a community college. The findings of this study indicate that if: (1) a parent college has reached its growth potential; (2) the governance structure provides participatory governance and empowerment of the center faculty and staff; (3) the round-trip travel time between the parent campus and the center exceeds one hour; (4) the communities in which the center is located develops a strong identity in which key community players demand "ownership" of the center; and/or (5) the resources become available either through state funding or through business and industry partnerships, then a center is likely to break free from the parent college to become a comprehensive college.

Introduction

The community college, more than any other type of college or university, is assumed to be responsive to the community in which it is located. Since its inception, society has placed greater and greater demand on the American community college to provide higher education opportunities

to the public. To meet that demand, the number of community colleges has continued to grow as well as the number of people served by most individual institutions.

Community colleges find the opening of campus centers, rather than the creation of new colleges, to be a viable method of addressing increased demands for higher education. History indicates that when a community college "single college district" opens a center campus, that center tends to follow one of two different patterns of development. The new campus typically either remains in the subordinate role of a center creating a "single college multi-campus district" or it develops into a comprehensive college creating a "multi-college district". The form a community college takes is influenced by a variety of environmental, social, political, and economic forces. This case study examines the forces that affect whether a center will break free from the parent campus and evolve into a comprehensive college.

A review of the literature provided only a small number of indirectly related articles and no studies which directly addressed the research question of: "What are the environmental, social, political, and economic forces that determine whether a center is likely to break free from the parent campus and evolve into a separate comprehensive college?"

Research Setting

The organizational subject of this study was a mature community college located in a well-established city. Both the city and the college exhibited few signs of ability or initiative for further growth. Within the community the influx of new business and industry was decreasing. The community college itself had little capability to accommodate increased numbers of students, faculty, or administrators.

To meet yet increasing student demands, the community college district opened two center campuses in neighboring towns within 20 miles of the parent campus, expanding the college to

accommodate a population of over 23,000 students, 190 full-time faculty, 500 part-time faculty, 50 administrators, and a full support staff. While this expansion enabled almost 24,000 students to enroll in course work, another 7,800 students who enrolled in the college, failed to register for a course at any location. The college did not conduct a formal study to examine why 7,800 people who were interested in higher education failed to register for courses, but the general consensus of faculty, administrators, and enrollment clerks was that a great number of these potential community college students simply could not find space available because the college did not offer sufficient courses.

Unlike the city in which the parent community college campus of this study was located, the general population of the state and the neighboring communities continued to grow. In the process, two patterns of accommodation developed: (1) underdeveloped communities experienced a burst of growth; and (2) new communities developed and grew at phenomenal rates. The community college district of this study experienced both phenomena resulting in increasing demand for educational services that were difficult to satisfy within the confines of the single campus district. To meet increasing educational demands and support further growth, the parent college chose to open two centers in separate, yet undeveloped, towns within the college district. The demand from the communities was so great that the centers were immediately operated at near capacity and came under pressure to increase educational offerings. This provided impetus pressure for the parent college to determine what structure the centers would take to accommodate future development.

Methodology

Data collection included and were triangulated through: (1) document collection; (2) interviews of board of trustee members, the college president, vice-president, provosts, deans,

academic senate president, collective bargaining agents, a variety of faculty members, and people working and living within the college district; (3) observations of planning committees, board of trustee, administrative, academic senate retreats and meetings; and (4) a review of the literature.

Institutional History

In March of 1916, after nearly two years of discussion, the local school board voted to give life to its first junior college. By September of that year, this infant college, housed in 14 rooms of the high school, employed 15 faculty and one administrator and offered 110 students their first opportunity to participate in low cost, community-based, higher education through selection from a 22 course schedule.

Typical of a new college nestled in a growing city, the junior college grew quickly. Even though the influence of World War II caused student enrollment to decline slightly, the philosophy and goal of the college was to continue to expand in response to community growth. The junior college added faculty members, increased course offerings, and steadily developed recognition within the community as an higher education institution unique from the high school in which it was housed.

The first signs of breaking from the high school occurred within four years of the junior college's inception when the college acquired its own land. In 1921, the California State Legislature passed the Junior College Act authorizing and leading to the formation of the city's own junior college district.

This college district was created and continued to be shaped by a combination of environmental, social, political, and economic forces. Study of these forces is a step toward understanding whether centers, when created, will remain in the subordinate role of a center

within the structure of a single college multi-campus district or develop into a college, thereby creating a multi-college district.

Environmental Forces

As the communities grew, the college struggled to keep pace with increased students needs and interests. The college developed the surrounding 100 acres of land and acquired additional real estate holdings. The parent campus was heavily populated, with little room or initiative for expansion. Inadequate parking was "cussed and discussed" daily, but no viable solution found. Additional construction on the parent campus would alter the environment by turning dedicated green spaces into concrete spaces. Reduction of green space to accommodate expansion was considered unacceptable.

Jenson's study (1984) of 14 multi-campus districts in five states indicates that most administrators believe 3,500 to 5,000 is the optimal size for a college. Both centers of this case study had achieved this size, indicating college status might be warranted. When asked the significance of the centers reaching the "optimal" size for a college, the college president responded, " We are there. That is why I am running ahead. We are not looking at this change in the abstract. The time is upon us."

Both communities in which the new centers were located grew rapidly, but differently. The businesses and industries of each community created separate and unique educational markets for each center. For example, in one community a hospital and a large number of shopping centers created a market for a work force educated in the fields of allied health, business, sales, and services. The second community had an established Naval Weaponry Station (which unlike many military facilities was not in danger of extinction as it provided a service unduplicated within the nation) and a correctional facility within the city limits that college administrators perceived as

supporting the need for college training in the area of public administration. The uniqueness of each community created markets which contributed to the parent college's inclination to allow the centers to break free and meet the unique demands of the communities in which they were situated.

Social Forces

Leadership philosophy plays a critical role in shaping any educational institution. The former college president was characterized by most faculty members, staff, administrators, and board members as a strong leader with an authoritarian style. One vice president stated, "[The former president] knew everyone on this campus, and he had his finger on everything that was happening." Interviews with community people in the college district substantiated the perception that the former president's personality had a strong influence on organizational activities and outcomes.

Even though the centers were officially opened on the same day, the former president conceptualized the sibling campuses, not as twins, but as sisters who would develop with unique characteristics and positions in the community. He spoke of a strong family loyalty, a bloodline that would hold the centers to the parent campus. The Single College Multi-Campus Committee, commonly known as the "Unity Committee", meeting biweekly, emulated the general leadership philosophy that "one" college would exist. However, before the siblings celebrated their first birthdays, the college president announced his retirement. After the departure of this president, the committee was not called together by the chairperson who rationalized, "There is no reason to meet until we find out what our course is to be."

The new president demonstrated a leadership philosophy that appeared to embrace participatory governance and the empowerment of various college entities. He created working

groups and supported their efforts through public communication of personal backing for projects as well as facilitation of resource allocation.

The new president characterized the centers as "growing children". He saw the centers "in terms of three institutions that would operate with considerable autonomy rather than as extensions the parent college. Each must be allowed to become its own college, but work as partners in this three college district."

The senior member of the board of trustees stated that the reconceptualization of the branch campuses as breaking away into colleges was "definitely a result of the change in leadership philosophy." This belief, expressed by a number of campus constituency, contributed to the understanding of the social forces that led this college to choose a president with a participatory leadership style.

The organization of most community colleges can be described as falling into one of two dichotomous organizational models: bureaucratic or participatory (Richardson, Blocker, and Bender, 1972). However, as far back as World War II, American community colleges began moving away from the bureaucratic model known for its resistance to change and its ability to stifle creativity and began an evolution toward a more participatory model of governance (Kintzer, 1980). As organizations mature, they develop mechanisms designed to limit previously strong influence on organizational outcomes (Lorenzo and Blanzy, 1988; Kimberly, Miles, and Associates, 1989). This mature college appeared to be straining against the bureaucratic authoritarian leadership style, demanding changes in organizational practices and leadership approaches characteristic of a participatory governance.

In addition to leadership philosophy, a force known as social distance appeared to influence the decision of which organizational structure the centers would take. During the course

of an interview, one vice president shared an anthropologist's look back in time. She told of social patterns which indicated that throughout time, whether traveling by foot, horse or car, people typically were willing to invest a maximum of one hour of travel time to find a mate. In current American society, thirty miles is considered one hour of legitimate travel time. The implication was that social distance, defined as the sustained obligation of time and effort, rather than physical distance, sets the parameters of certain social realities. On the basis of the notion that people created one hour social boundaries for purposes of love and procreation, it seemed reasonable to conclude that they would not be likely to set wider boundaries for the purpose of attaining higher education.

Cohen's study of the relationship between a state's population density, the number of community colleges in a state, and the area of service indicates that the founders of community colleges recognized these social boundaries. Cohen reported that "community colleges tended to be built so that 90-95 percent of the state's population lived within reasonable commuting distance, about 25 miles" (1972, p. 12). The community college of this case study, early in the process of deciding whether it needed new campuses, considered a study which indicated that if people had to drive more than 30 miles, they felt no connection with that college and were not interested in attending a college so distant from them.

This phenomenon was apparent in the relationship between the parent campus and its two centers. There came a point at which the social distance became too great as the time spent in travel increased due to population growth and resulting congestion. Ties between the parent and its siblings began to fray and evolve toward the structure of separate "colleges".

Additionally, the more "hazardous" the commute was perceived to be, the more likely the split from the parent campus. The trip between the parent campus under study and its centers at

peak commute times was described by many as "hazardous". While both faculty and administrators at the parent campus noted that when the drive to one center took 20 minutes, the drive was not a big problem; however, they expressed irritation when the same drive turned into a 40 minute time commitment during freeway rush hours. The times of day at which this commute took 40 minutes continued to increase as the community became more heavily populated. Increased numbers of people perceived the centers as too distant and were unwilling to make the physical connection for meetings, teaching assignments, administrative duties, and other activities that work to bond the parent to its offspring. Just as in the anthropologist's story, the commitment of time and effort created social boundaries which worked to separate the offspring from the parent.

Political Forces

As a college enters maturity, the dominance of key figures and board members diminishes (Lorenzo and Blanzy, 1988) and new political forces come into play. Kintzer reports that not only have faculty, staff, and students assumed new responsibility for the management of colleges, but community groups increasingly serve as advisory groups thus exerting new influence upon the decision-making process (1980).

Variances existed in the extent to which the centers of this study were focal points of the developing communities. Townspeople from government, business, industry, and other educational institutions were included in the discussions which shaped the futures of the centers. In this advisory capacity, these community groups developed bonds that strained the allegiance of the siblings to the parent campus. Both communities had strong and well developed self-identities. These communities "know they are separate from [the mature city], and they know they

are separate from each other," stated the college president. Key players in this evolution, mayors, council, business people, and other influential citizens typically want to "own" their own college.

However, the political drive and entities within each community differed. It did not appear likely the first community, growing stronger daily, would be content with higher education in their community as provided by a "subsidiary" of the "main" college. Within the second center's community, the political forces were weaker, possibly because the college center served two neighboring cities who disagreed on many issues. The college president claimed , "[The parent campus] created the seeds for separate colleges by creating these two centers outside the city limits. If they had been created inside the city, it would have been a different story. Because they are in separate municipalities, and municipalities that see themselves as distinct and separate from [this city], in the case of a community college, you are bound to give these centers the scope that they need to represent the communities."

Two additional political forces moved the college toward a leadership change which would contribute to the centers' ability to break free from the parent campus. First, in 1988, shared governance was mandated by California Assembly Bill 1725. This bill gave faculty a greater role in the decision-making of a community college and set in place a structure that required leadership that practiced participatory governance. Second, only one original trustee, who placed the past president in his position, remained on the board. This turnover in board members weakened support for the previous style of management and was followed by a change in the office of president/superintendent. These political forces worked together to establish the perceived need for change in leadership style which led the past president and two vice-presidents to announce their collective retirements, thereby facilitating transition to a participatory governance model.

Economic Factors

The ability to break away, in part, depends upon available tax dollars to support the development of centers into colleges. At the time of this case study, some legislative support existed for colleges to expand to meet community needs. Because of this support, the possibility existed for offering a greater number of programs if the centers were allowed to develop into colleges. An economy-of-scale was expected to bring tax dollars to the district to provide educational services.

However, given economic conditions, state allocations would not provide sufficient financing to develop the centers into colleges. The breaking away to form separate colleges also depended upon alternate resources. In part, the evolution may depend on "the ability of our people to do things," stated the new college president. "As a community college, our responsibility extends beyond the liberal arts and sciences. We must have professional programs. These programs require resources, special equipment and facilities. The community college must look to business and industry to form partnerships to develop these professional programs." However, the forming of future partnerships hinged on the initiative and ability of individuals to secure such arrangements.

Conclusions

A culmination of a number of environmental, social, political, and economic forces determine whether a center will remain in the subordinate role of a center creating a "single college multi-campus district" or develop into a separate college creating a "multi-college district". The findings of this study indicate: (1) if a parent college has reached its growth potential; (2) if the governance structure provides participatory governance and empowerment of the center faculty and staff; (3) if the round-trip travel time between a parent and a center reaches one hour; (4) if the community in which a center is located develops a strong identity in which key community players demand "ownership" of the center; and/or (5) if the resources become available either through state funding or through business and industry partnerships, then a center is likely to break free to become a college.

This one study does not make clear whether all these forces, or a particular combination of a lesser number of these forces, must be in place to allow a center to break free from the parent college. Further investigation is needed to answer that question.

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